

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002170

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA FOR DALTON, MITCHELL AND SIMS
AF FOR RAYNOR
NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR GURNEY
PARIS FOR NEARY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER
VOA/IBB FOR OGULNIK, STEWART, MENGESHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAO KMDR ZI

SUBJECT: VOA'S STUDIO 7 MAKING WAVES IN ZIMBABWE; HARARE

- ¶1. At first glance, Negussie Mengesha's - VOA Program Manager, Africa Division - visit to Zimbabwe seemed difficult, if not impossible. What stood in his way was the hardnosed anti-VOA Studio 7 rhetoric by the government of Zimbabwe's spokesman, Information Minister Jonathan Moyo. "Studio 7 will die. It faces death. They think we are sleeping, we want to see where they are going with Studio 7," Moyo was quoted as saying recently in the local press. With statements like this, it appears to be yet another hurdle to be jumped, another myth to be conquered. However, unlike the proverbial angry child who runs away from the demands of home, burning bridges and scattering ashes in its wake, Mengesha flew into Zimbabwe on October 19, only to be welcomed by Nathan Shamuyarira, ZANU PF Secretary for Information and Publicity, and saluted by the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Morgan Tsvangirai, before hobnobbing with Zimbabwe's most polished journalists, media watchdogs and recording companies.
- ¶2. To his surprise and eventual pleasure, notwithstanding the sad arrest of Studio 7 stringer Moreblessing Zulu (later released without charge), Mengesha was drenched with positive feedback about the "very informative station." Much like the slow but persistent tortoise that eventually outran the swifter hare in the ancient African fable, Studio 7 - after a few uncomfortable broadcasts - has inched steadily ahead after hitting the airwaves in Zimbabwe eight months ago. He was informed of modest gains in the number of listeners in both rural and urban settings, especially after the closure of Zimbabwe's only independent daily newspaper "The Daily News" by the government of Zimbabwe on September 12, 2003 following a Supreme Court declaration that the paper was operating outside the law. The ever-increasing cover cost of mainstream newspapers is also driving bountiful news consumers to listen to Studio 7's "timely, accurate. and balanced" news programs.
- ¶3. Mr. Mengesha paid a courtesy call on Mr. Sunsleepy Chamunorwa, Editor-in-Chief of the independent weekly "The Financial Gazette." Mr. Chamunorwa fell hook, line and sinker over a proposal by Mr. Mengesha to introduce an Editor's Forum program when the station starts airing programs seven days a week. Mr. Bornwell Chakaodza, Editor of the independent weekly "The Standard", also backed the idea. Chakaodza even volunteered to be on the panel without any hesitation. All editors gave kudos to Studio 7 and encouraged the station to continue striving for excellence and balanced reporting, adding, they are prepared to carry Studio 7 ads in their newspapers. Mengesha also touched base with officials from the Zimbabwe Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) during a luncheon arranged at USAID. He also met with the editorial team of the Media Monitoring Project at the same venue. Issues discussed during these meetings covered the welfare of journalists in Zimbabwe, press freedom, and how the controversial Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) is affecting journalists, especially those working for the independent press or foreign media. With the Studio 7 music library in mind, Mr. Mengesha also visited two recording companies in Harare - Zimbabwe Music Corporation and Ngaavongwe Records. The two recording companies expressed interest in providing Studio 7 with the latest information on the top selling local albums and songs.
- ¶4. The meeting with opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai was a brilliant eye opener. According to Mr. Tsvangirai, people in outlying areas are surprisingly listening to Studio 7. "One old man at one of my rallies in a remote part of Zimbabwe boldly asked me to grant more interviews to Studio 7," he disclosed to Mr.

Mengesha. Mr. Tsvangirai took his hat off to Studio 7 "for its Herculean, successful efforts to spread the news about Zimbabwe, from Zimbabwe, by Zimbabweans."

15. You don't need an overload of cash to get an overload of performance from stringers. The VOA training program for the stringers in Johannesburg, South Africa and the visit to the "war zone" by "General" Negussie Mengesha, encouraged and overjoyed the stringers. In the true spirit of a Marvin Gaye song - Brother, brother, brother. . . You know we've got to find a way to bring some loving here. . . What's going on? - Zimbabweans know that truth is going on, on Studio 7. And hope. And a balanced source of news that gives listeners a front row seat on events happening in Zimbabwe.
16. So, congratulations and please keep on keeping on. Because without an objective alternative voice, Zimbabweans will cease to be informed, especially in an environment where state-controlled media has a print and electronic monopoly. Keep it going for Zimbos!

SULLIVAN